

Ludification of work or labourisation of play? On work/play interferences in the digital times.

Fizek, Sonia  
Dippel, Anne

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## **Ludification of Work or Labourisation of Play? On work/play interferences in the digital times.**

Dr. Sonia Fizek  
Abertay University, UK

Dr. Anne Dippel  
Friedrich-Schiller University of Jena, Germany

*If anything could be said to characterize new modes of work/play, it would be precisely this sort of  
interplay.  
(O'Donnell 2014, 12)*

Games and play seem to be determined by their self-sufficiency and closely defined “magic circle”, which is creating a temporary world within the ordinary one (Huizinga 1938/1992, 10). They remain on the opposite end of self-alienating work and drudgery as long as they are non-serious (Huizinga 1938/1992, 10), unproductive (Caillois 1958/2001, 10), joyous (Scheuerl 1979, 69), and utterly absorbing (Huizinga 1938/1992, 10), making the players lose themselves in the constellation of playful time and space. So, “... [w]hat becomes of games when the sharp line dividing their ideal rules from the diffuse and insidious laws of daily life is blurred?”, asked Caillois almost six decades ago (1958/2001, 43).

In the blurring of lines and the opening of the magic circle Caillois saw a negative process of contamination and corruption of play, which no longer remains within its fictitious boundaries. In his reasoning, the four elements of play (*agon*, *alea*, *mimicry*, *ilinx*) when devoid of playful convention transform into destructive activities, such as violence (the corruption of competition), superstition (the corruption of chance), alienation (the corruption of simulation), or alcoholism and drug addiction (the corruption of vertigo) (Caillois 1958/ 2001, 53-54).

The process of blurring the work-play and seriousness-playfulness lines was also already brought to attention in the last chapter of *Homo Ludens*, where Huizinga (1938/1992) discusses the loss of the purity of a frivolous playful experience and emphasizes the confusion of where play ends and non-play begins. To support his claim, he uses the example of commercial rivalry and emphasizes the *agon* element in business, noticing that “... some of the great business concerns deliberately instill the play-spirit into their workers so as to step up production” (Huizinga 1938/1992, 200). By doing so, they turn business into play, and as a result play becomes business. The two allegedly mutually exclusive aspects of human practice, work and play, interfere and transform the everyday life.

In the digital age this differentiation between work and play further disappears and dissolves. Joost Raessens (2010, 6) discussing the ludification of culture, notices that play is not only characteristic of leisure, but also turns up in those domains that once were considered the opposite of play, such as education, politics and even warfare. This flooding of life with game elements leads naturally to the presence of play (the activity of play) and playfulness (the attitude of play) in the domains previously reserved for or associated with serious endeavors, such as work. However, in order to understand this play-centered dynamics we need to realize that the process of ludification of culture is not a one-way road. For as much as play enters the allegedly play-free domains of life, such as workspace, seemingly non-ludic practices pervade playgrounds – “... labor itself is now play, just as play becomes more and more laborious” (Galloway 2013).

This mutual effect has been recently described in terms of the ludification of culture, and the cultivation of ludus, pointing to the fact that not only games and play move towards the center of

our cultural, social, and economic existence, but also other realms of life impress their forms onto play (Deterding and Walz 2015, 7). Following the same logic, we have introduced the concept of *labourization* (Dippel and Fizek 2015) as a contrasting term to that of gamification (Deterding et al. 2011) or ludification (Raessens 2006, 2010, 2014; Mäyra 2015). It denotes the process of the permeation of play with work elements. However, the work-play relationship is neither fully embraced by gamification and ludification, nor labourization.

In order to encompass the overlay of the work-play relationship, we are proposing the concept of *interference* (Dippel and Fizek 2016), borrowing a term that originally was used in Physics to denote the superposition of waves. It allows us to describe the interactions between phenomena, and their transformative character. The proposed *work/play interference* delineates the relation between supposedly non-productive playful activities and productive work-related behaviors. It illustrates the dissolving distinction between the two qualities, and surpasses a strictly dualistic mode of thinking. By doing so it has the chance to characterize the complexities and impurities of social praxis more accurately.

In this paper we will give numerous examples of such interferences, touching upon:

- a) Laborious playgrounds: citizen science games and other science challenges, such as the Higgs Boson Machine Learning Challenge (Dippel and Fizek 2015, 2016)
- b) Playful laboratories: collaborative playful scientific spaces, such as CERN (Dippel and Fizek 2015);

It is precisely such interferences, interplays, transgressions, crossed boundaries or blurred lines, which paint a large part of the most recent ludic landscape, and lead to the rise of the new modes of work/play. And these are possibly taking us into the age in which we are not only saturating the everyday with playful forms of expression, but also immersing the frivolous play in productivity and labor. Or as Sicart also puts it, moving play into the realms of efficiency, seriousness and technical determinism (Sicart 2014, 5). The question remains: are we embracing the transgressing laborious and playful phenomena as empowering and engaging, or observing them with caution, restraint, or even suspicion in Caillois' spirit?

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